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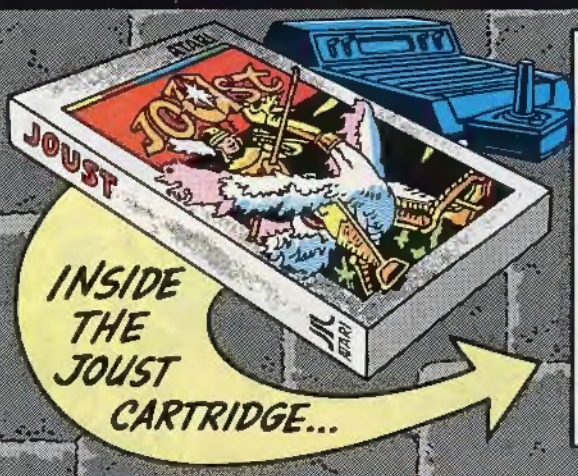


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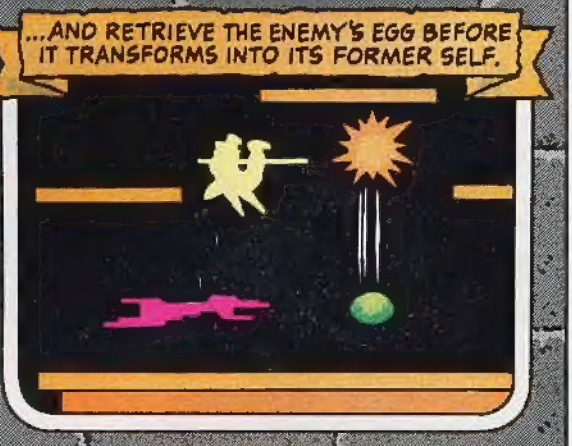


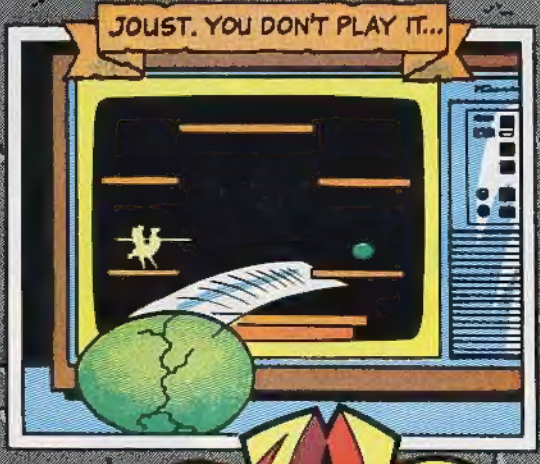

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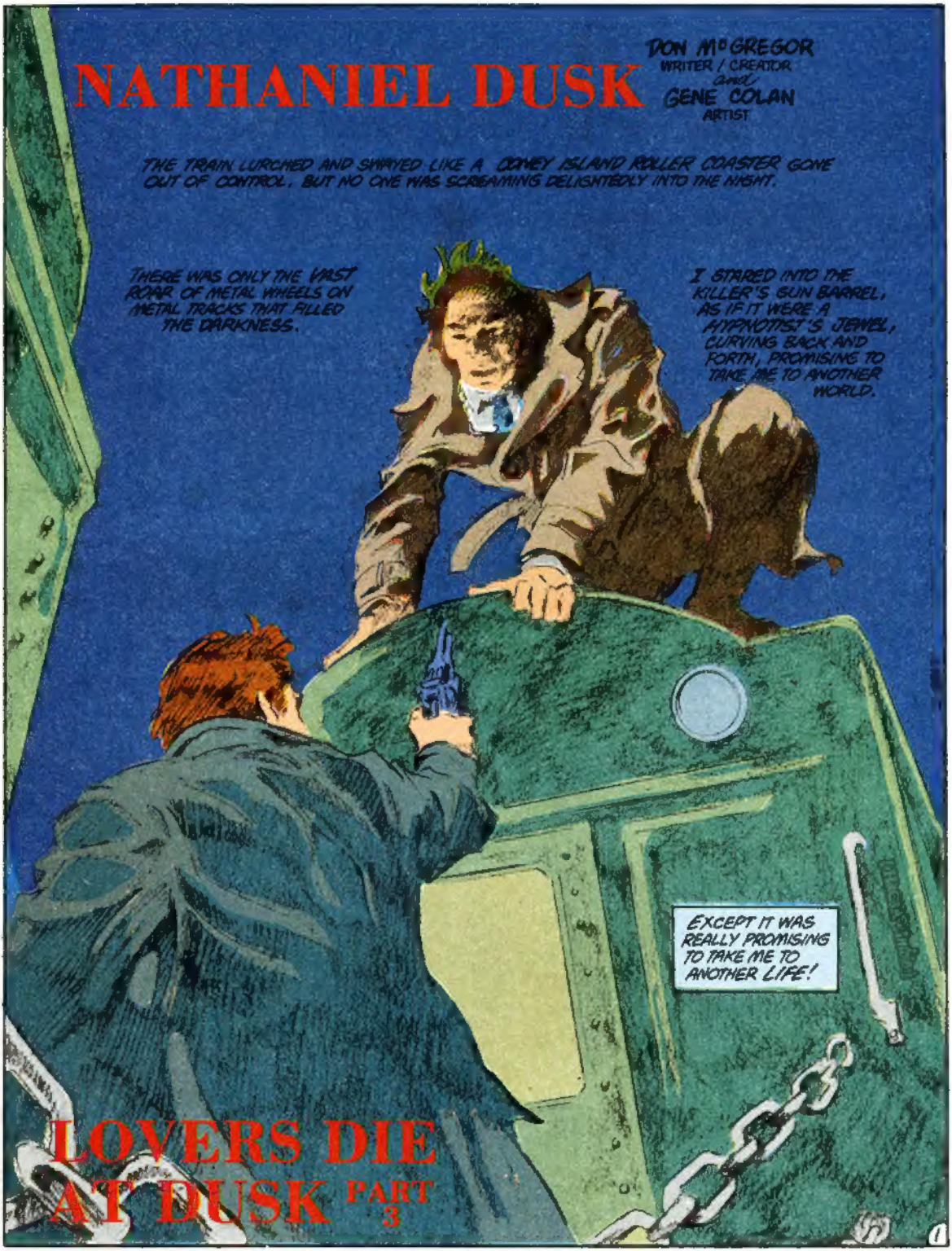


JOHN COSTANZA, LETTERER • TOM ZIUKO, COLORIST • ALAN GOLD, EDITOR

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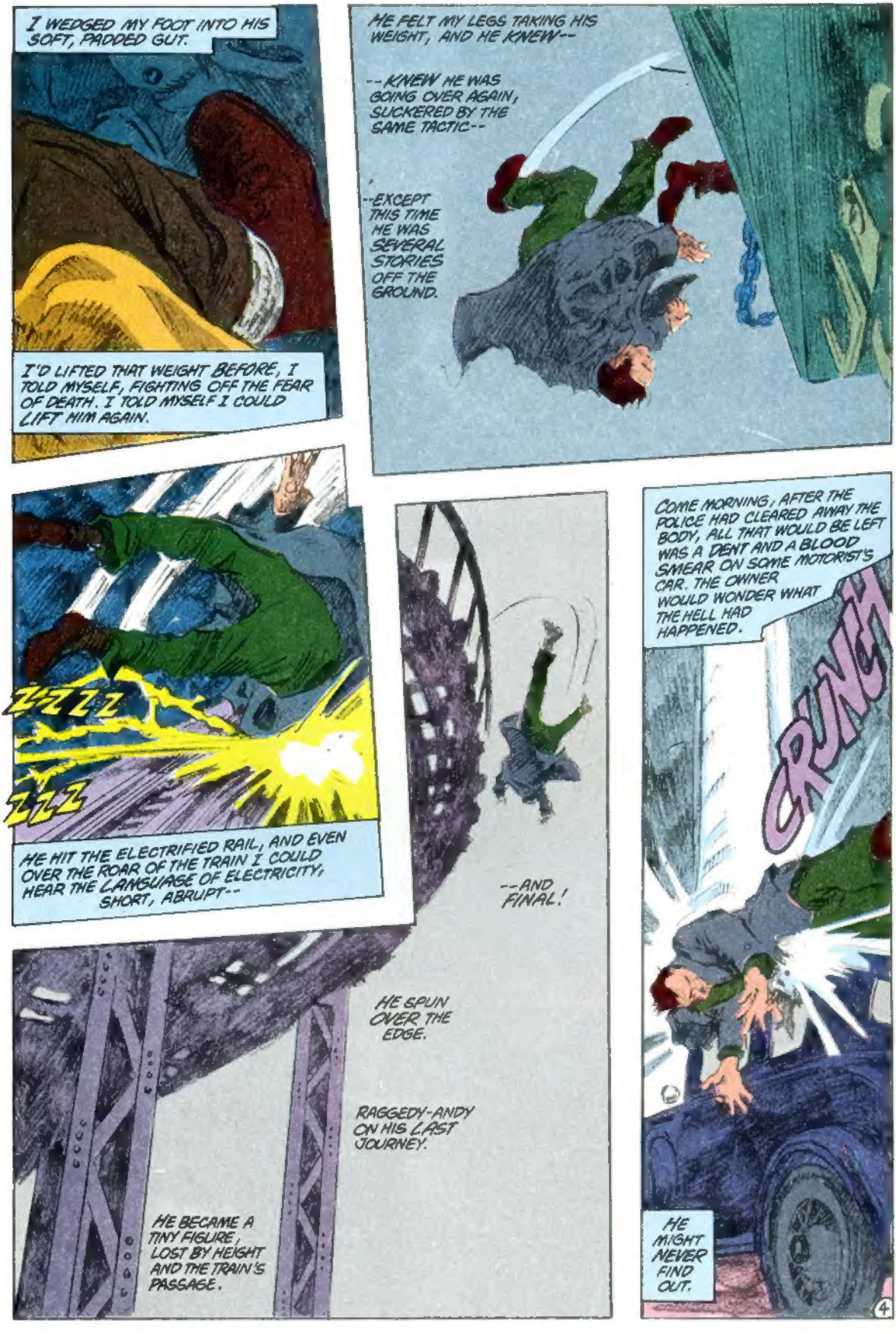
SOME FOLKS MIGHT CLAIM IT WAS A "BETTER" LIFE. I WASN'T SO INCLINED TO BELIEVE THEM.
BAMM
THE GUN BLAST WAS SO CLOSE, IT BURNED MY FLESH. IT LEFT MY TEMPLE THROBBING, LIKE THE FIRST SUNBURN OF SUMMER.
HE FIRED AGAIN, AS WE COLLIDED, TWO RAGGEDY-ANDY FIGURES LOCKED IN THE CRAZY METALLIC DANCE OF THE ELEVATED TRAIN.
I WHACKED MY ELBOW INTO THE DOORFRAME, AND THE PAIN SHOT UP BEHIND MY EYES!
BAMM
CHRIST, IT HURT!
I WANTED TO GRAB THE ELBOW, TO CONTAIN THE PAIN, BUT OVERRODE THE IMPULSE AND HELD ON TO HIS GUN. HIS FINGERNAILS WERE GRIMY WITH LAST WEEK'S DIRT, AND BITTEN INTO A JAGGED LINE.
THEY TRIED TO DIG UNDER THE CURVE OF BONE OF MY EYE SOCKET AND GOUGE MY EYE OUT.
I WONDERED IF AN EYE TRULY COULD BE PLUCKED OUT OF A MAN'S HEAD.
I DIDN'T WANT AN ANSWER.
2

WHACK
HE WAS GOING TO USE THAT GUN ANY DAMN WAY HE COULD--
--IF NOT THE BUSINESS END, THEN THE BUTT.
THUD
I HIT HIM WITH EVERYTHING I HAD, ONCE--
--TWICE!
HE HARDLY SEEMED TO FEEL THE PUNCHES. I'D HAD NO LEVERAGE BEHIND THEM, AND HE WAS FORCING ME BACK.
BELOW, THE CITY FLASHED BY, AN ALIEN BLUR, A CITY I DID NOT KNOW.
THE METAL LINKS OF CHAIN, JOINING THE TWO CARS, HELD US LIKE AN UNBALANCED HAMMOCK, WHERE ONE WRONG MOVE COULD DUMP YOU ON YOUR ASS!
I TRIED TO SHOVE HIM OFF ME, AN ALARM SCREAMING INSANELY IN MY HEAD, CONVINCED I WAS GOING TO DIE. MY FINGERS SLIPPED THROUGH THE SALIVA ON HIS LIPS, INTO THE SOFT, GOOSHY AREA UNDER HIS TONGUE. IT FELT LIKE I WAS DIGGING THROUGH A HATCHING NEST OF MAGGOTS!


I WEDGED MY FOOT INTO HIS SOFT, PADDED GUT.
I'D LIFTED THAT WEIGHT BEFORE, I TOLD MYSELF, FIGHTING OFF THE FEAR OF DEATH. I TOLD MYSELF I COULD LIFT HIM AGAIN.
HE FELT MY LEGS TAKING HIS WEIGHT, AND HE KNEW--
--KNEW HE WAS GOING OVER AGAIN, SUCKERED BY THE SAME TACTIC--
--EXCEPT THIS TIME HE WAS SEVERAL STORIES OFF THE GROUND.
ZZZZ
ZZZ
HE HIT THE ELECTRIFIED RAIL, AND EVEN OVER THE ROAR OF THE TRAIN I COULD HEAR THE LANGUAGE OF ELECTRICITY; SHORT, ABRUPT--
--AND FINAL!
HE SPUN OVER THE EDGE.
RAGGEDY-ANDY ON HIS LAST JOURNEY.
HE BECAME A TINY FIGURE, LOST BY HEIGHT AND THE TRAIN'S PASSAGE.
COME MORNING, AFTER THE POLICE HAD CLEARED AWAY THE BODY, ALL THAT WOULD BE LEFT WAS A DENT AND A BLOOD SMEAR ON SOME MOTORIST'S CAR. THE OWNER WOULD WONDER WHAT THE HELL HAD HAPPENED.
CRUNCH
HE MIGHT NEVER FIND OUT.

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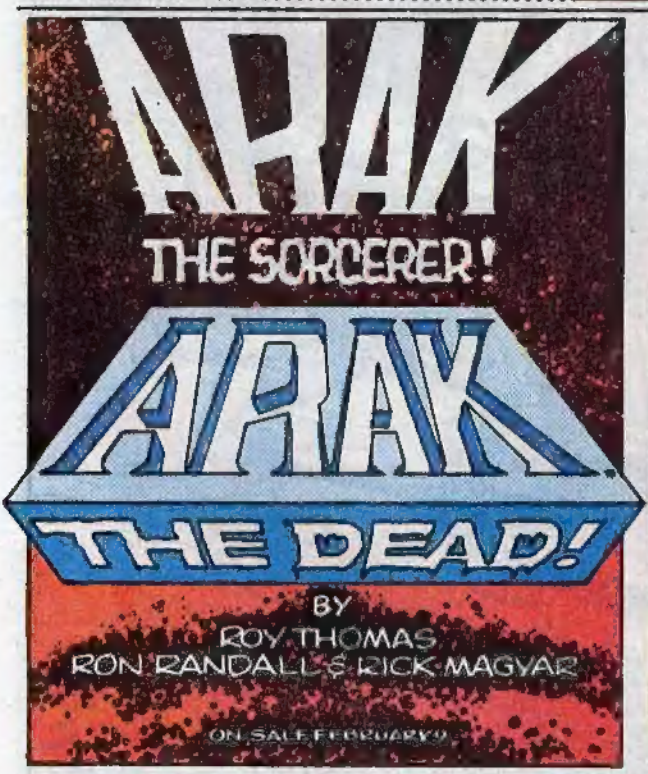


THE NEW D.C. THERE'S NO STOPPING US NOW.

THE TRAIN CAME TO ITS ORDINARY STOP, THE PEOPLE ON THE STATION PLATFORM AND THE FEW PASSENGERS ABOARD UNAWARE THAT ANYTHING EXTRAORDINARY HAD HAPPENED.
I JUMPED ONTO THE PLATFORM, WONDERING WHEN "CADAVER" PICHANO WOULD SHOW HIS PLEASANT FACE.
BAM
THE BRAKES SCREECHED, LIKE THE SOUND OF CHALK ON A BLACKBOARD INCREASED A THOUSAND-FOLD.
AS SOON AS I HIT THE CEMENT, THE SONOFABITCH APPEARED. HE NEVER SPOKE, EXCEPT WITH HIS GUN. MAYBE IT WAS A VOICE SUBSTITUTE.
HE LOOKED LIKE A CORPSE DRESSED UP IN MORTUARY FINEST.
IT'S NO WONDER CITY FOLKS SOMETIMES GO A LITTLE BIT CRAZY.
I STILL DIDN'T KNOW WHY HE WAS DETER-MINED TO KILL ME.
THE FACT WAS, NEITHER THE PUS-UGLY WHO GOT HIMSELF FRIED ON THE RAILS OR THIS WALKING GHOUL HAD KILLED JOYCE.
SPINNING
THEY'D BEEN TOO BUSY CHASING ME AROUND THE UPPER TIERS OF THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING AT THE TIME JOYCE HAD BEEN MURDERED.
I RAN OUT INTO THE WET SLUSH. IT LEAKED THROUGH THE SOLES OF MY SHOES.
I DIDN'T GIVE A DAMN. I WAS JUST GLAD I WAS STILL ALIVE TO FEEL IT.
5

THE CITY SIGHED WITH DISTANT CAR MOTORS DRIFTING PAST, THEIR LIGHTS CHASING SHADOWS ACROSS MY OFFICE WALLS.

I HELD ON TO MY GUN LIKE A CHILD HOLDING A TATTERED TEDDY BEAR THAT WOULD SEE IT SAFELY THROUGH THE NIGHT.

I CLOSED MY EYES AND SAW JOYCE IN THE DEEP DARKNESS. I WANTED HER TO BE ALIVE SO TERRIBLY. I SOBBED. IT SOUNDED AS IF SOMEONE WERE DYING.

I GREW ANGRY WITH HER. I WANTED HER THERE SO I COULD SHOUT AT HER, ASK HER WHY SHE HAD NEVER TOLD ME WHO SHE TRULY WAS.

I HAD THE FEELING IT WAS AS MUCH MY FAULT AS HERS THAT I DIDN'T KNOW, THAT I HAD BEEN TOO CONTENT TO TOUCH AND HOLD AND MAKE LOVE WITH HER TO REALLY ASK THE QUESTIONS I SHOULD HAVE.

I'D HAVE TO ASK HER CHILDREN, JENNIE AND ANTHONY.

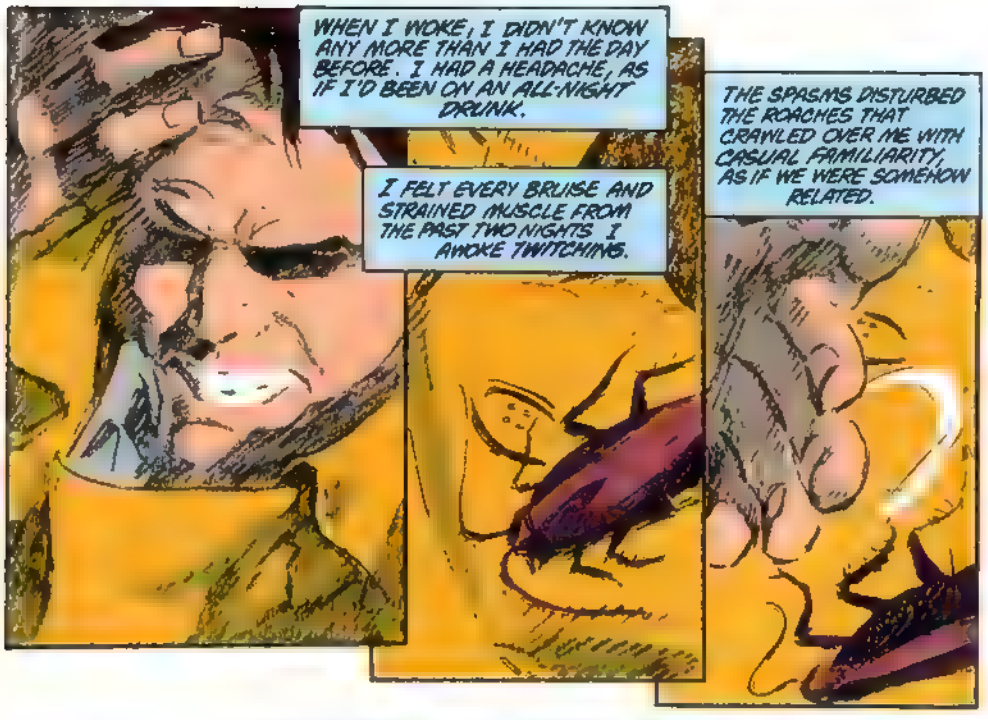
I'D HAVE TO LOOK IN HER DAUGHTER'S EYES; THOSE EYES THAT WERE THE SAME BROWN AND JADE AS HER MOTHER'S.

I'D HAVE TO BE THE GROWN-UP. THE ADULT.

I KEPT WAITING FOR THE SHAPE OF THE BOGEYMAN TO FALL ON THE FROSTED GLASS OF THE OUTER DOOR.

I SLEPT, AND DREAMT I WAS BACK IN THE COLD TRENCHES OF FRANCE DURING THE GREAT WAR. I THOUGHT I SMELLED GAS. I THOUGHT IT WAS SEEPING INTO MY LUNGS. I WONDERED IF IT WAS GOING TO KILL ALL OF US IN THE TRENCHES, OR JUST A SELECT FEW.

I FIGURED I'D KNOW BY MORNING.



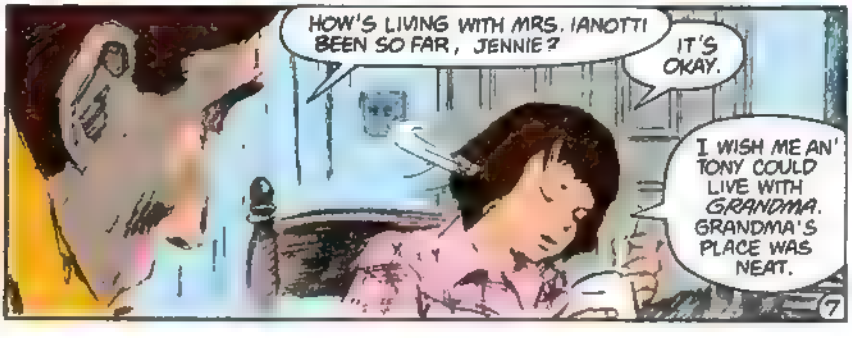

THE DAMN ROACH AND ME PROBABLY DID HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON.

# SATURDAY MORNING FEBRUARY 3, 1934

JENNIE'S BROWN-AND-JADE EYES WENT FROM DISINTEREST TO HURT TO MISCHIEVOUSNESS EVEN DEATH HAD DIFFICULTY MARKING A PERMANENT SCAR ON A TEN-YEAR-OLD. IT MIGHT BE YEARS BEFORE THE SCAR REALLY SHOWED.

WE SAT IN MRS. IANOTTI'S KITCHEN, WHOSE WALLS HELD THE AROMAS OF COUNTLESS COOKED DINNERS, A PLEASANT, COMFORTING SMELL, THE WAY YOU LIKE TO REMEMBER HOME BEING, EVEN IF IT WASN'T THAT WAY AT ALL.

I TRIED TO TALK ABOUT HER MOTHER, WITHOUT MENTIONING WHAT WE BOTH KNEW, THAT SHE WAS DEAD. I WISHED I HAD A STRAW, MAYBE EVEN A GLASS OF MILK TO BLOW BUBBLES IN.



I WISH I COULD CALL GRANDMA. I MEAN, I LIKE MRS. IANOTTI AN' EVERYTHING, BUT...
HOLD UP A MINUTE, JENNIE, YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T LIVE WITH YOUR GRANDMA.. YOUR MOMMA TOLD ME SHE'S BEEN DEAD FOR YEARS.
OH, NO, SHE'S NOT!
WE JUST COULDN'T VISIT HER NO MORE. BUT SHE WASN'T DEAD OR NOTHING.
I ASKED MOMMY IF GRANDMA DIED LIKE DADDY DID, 'CAUSE I DON'T HARDLY 'MEMBER DADDY MOMMY SAID, "GRANDMA LIVES WHERE NO ONE COULD VISIT HER NOW." SO I KNOW YOU'RE WRONG.
JUST LIKE YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT AMOS AN' ANDY BEING WHITE.
SQUIT
SOMETIMES I THINK YOU DON'T KNOW TOO MUCH.
YOU WON'T TELL MRS. IANOTTI?
OOOOPS!
NOT A PEEP.
ANY SPILLED MILK WILL BE BETWEEN YOU AND ME.
I WALKED UP THE STAIRS TO JOYCE'S APARTMENT, FEELING LIKE A THIEF. I WAS ABOUT TO RANSACK HER PLACE...
LISTEN, JENNIE, YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE YOUR GRANDMA LIVED?
Y'MEAN, HOW TO GET THERE?
OH, NO! BUT YOU HADDA TAKE LOTS OF TRAINS TO GET THERE
I LIKE TRAINS... BUT TRAINS'RE NOISY LIKE ANYTHING.
... FIND ALL THE LITTLE THINGS SHE'D HIDDEN FROM THE PUBLIC EYE, THE THINGS SHE DIDN'T EVEN SHOW ME.
I TOLD MYSELF IT WAS WHAT A DETECTIVE WAS SUPPOSED TO DO.
I TOLD MYSELF IT WOULD HELP ME FIND OUT WHO HAD KILLED HER.
8

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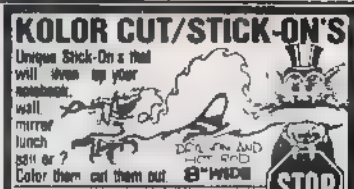


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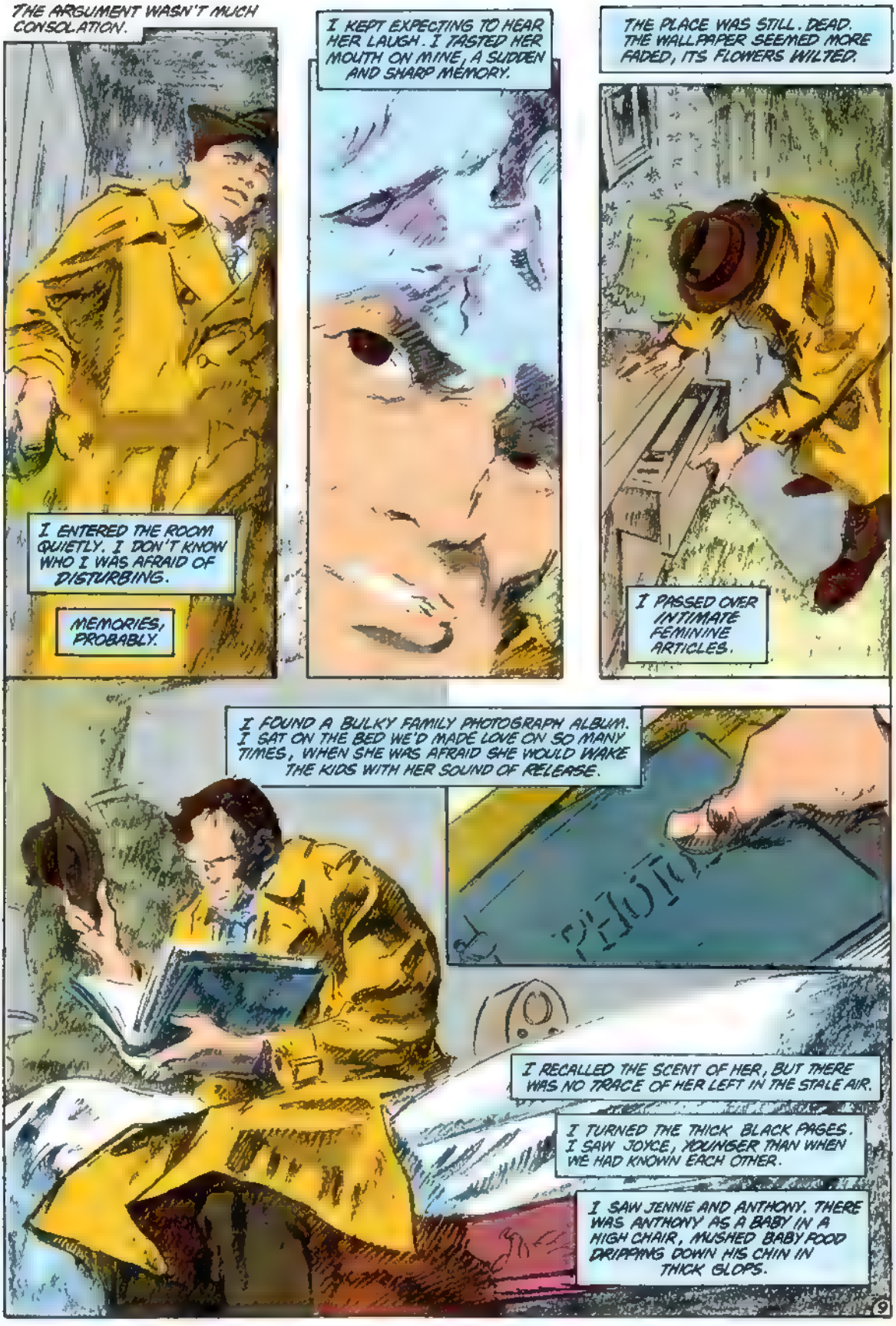
THE ARGUMENT WASN'T MUCH CONSOLATION.
I ENTERED THE ROOM QUIETLY. I DON'T KNOW WHO I WAS AFRAID OF DISTURBING.
MEMORIES, PROBABLY.
I KEPT EXPECTING TO HEAR HER LAUGH. I TASTED HER MOUTH ON MINE, A SUDDEN AND SHARP MEMORY.
THE PLACE WAS STILL. DEAD. THE WALLPAPER SEEMED MORE FADED, ITS FLOWERS WILTED.
I PASSED OVER INTIMATE FEMININE ARTICLES.
I FOUND A BULKY FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM. I SAT ON THE BED WE'D MADE LOVE ON SO MANY TIMES, WHEN SHE WAS AFRAID SHE WOULD WAKE THE KIDS WITH HER SOUND OF RELEASE.
I RECALLED THE SCENT OF HER, BUT THERE WAS NO TRACE OF HER LEFT IN THE STALE AIR.
I TURNED THE THICK BLACK PAGES. I SAW JOYCE, YOUNGER THAN WHEN WE HAD KNOWN EACH OTHER.
I SAW JENNIE AND ANTHONY. THERE WAS ANTHONY AS A BABY IN A HIGH CHAIR, MUSHED BABY FOOD DRIPPING DOWN HIS CHIN IN THICK GLOPS.

NOW, THAT WAS ODD. MANY OF THE PICTURES WERE TORN, AS IF SOMEONE ELSE HAD BEEN IN THOSE PICTURES. SOMEONE SHE NO LONGER WANTED TO SEE.
THE ROOMS SHE AND THE KIDS SAT IN WERE EXPENSIVE, NOT PART OF A ROOMING HOUSE LIKE MRS. IANOTTI'S.
Mrs Stella Gulino
1514 125th St.
Apt 4A
New York, N.Y.
AND THERE WAS AN ADDRESS TUCKED IN ONE OF THE PAGES, JUST IN CASE SHE DID FORGET SOMETHING SHE DID NOT WANT TO FORGET.
STELLA GULINO.
GRANDMA
I FIGURED I'D TAKE A FEW TRAIN RIDES.
CLK
AFTERNOON, NATE!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE, ABRAHAMS?
10

I FIGURED YOU'D HAVE TO START LOOKING SOMEWHERE FOR LEADS... SOMEWHERE TO BEGIN THE LEGWORK.
WHAT BETTER PLACE THAN MISS GULINO'S APARTMENT?
I'VE NEVER BEEN FOND OF HAVING GUNS POINTED AT ME, EVEN IF THEY'RE HELD BY FRIENDS OR COPS.
THEY HAVE A TENDENCY TO DO BAD THINGS TO YOUR HEALTH.
WHY DON'T YOU JUST LOWER THAT A BIT?
DON'T SOFT-SOAP ME, NATE!
YOU KNOW WHY I'M HERE.
I'M TAKING YOU IN.
FOR WHAT?
FOR THE MURDER OF ARTHUR SQUIRE. YOU COULDN'T FORGET HIM. HE'S THE MICKEY MOUSE PUBLISHER WHO CAME TO MISS GULINO'S FUNERAL.
HE'S ALSO THE WIMP YOU BEAT ON. HE TURNED UP DEAD, WITH HIS THROAT SLIT AND YOUR FINGERPRINTS ALL OVER HIS KITCHEN.
I LOOKED INTO MURRAY'S EYES, BEYOND THE GUN, ABOVE THE DARK HOLE OF PASSIONLESS INFINITY THAT IS A MESSAGE FROM ANY GUN BARREL WHEN IT IS POINTED IN YOUR DIRECTION.
HE LOOKED HAGGARD. I HADN'T SEEN HIM LOOK THAT WAY SINCE HIS WIFE, REBECCA, HAD MISCARRIED TWO YEARS AGO.
HIS EYES HAD THE SAME WEARINESS BACK THEN, AS WE'D SAT IN A DINER, HIS FORK MONOTONOUSLY DIGGING AT THE CENTER OF A FRIED EGG AS HE TOLD ME BECKY'D LOST THEIR CHILD.

YOU DIDN'T FIND MY PRINTS ON THE KNIFE.
YEAH. TRUE. BUT WE FOUND THEM EVERY-WHERE ELSE.
COME ON, MURRAY!
OH.
IT'S MURRAY NOW, IS IT?
NOT ABRAHAMS ANYMORE?
YOU THINK I'D KILL SQUIRE LIKE THAT?
DOESN'T MATTER WHAT I THINK. THINKING CAN GET YOU INTO BIG TROUBLE--
--ESPECIALLY IF YOU IGNORE THE FACTS.
THE FACTS ARE, SQUIRE CALLED ME. WHEN I GOT THERE, HE WAS DEAD. HE'D HAD COMPANY. THAT OUT-OF-TOWN GUNSEL "CADAVER" PICHANO WAS THERE WITH A PIG-STICKER.
THE BIG MOUTH WAS THERE, TOO
YEAH. WE FOUND HIS BODY UNDER THE EL DURING THE NIGHT. HIS NAME'S "BIG MOUTH" WILLIE GUGENHEIM. HIS DEATH'S ANOTHER CHARGE BEING BROUGHT AGAINST YOU.
THE D.A.'S STARTING TO GO NUTS ON THIS, NATE. MAYOR LA GUARDIA'D BE BREATHING FIRE IN YOUR DIRECTION IF HE WEREN'T SO TIED UP WITH THIS TAXICAB STRIKE.
YOU TAKE ME IN, MURRAY, IT'S THE RUBBER HOSE TIME. THEY'LL SCRAMBLE MY BRAINS FOR ME, TRYING TO FIND OUT THINGS I DON'T KNOW YET.
PLAT
AND THERE'S ALWAYS THE ELECTRIC CHAIR WAITING IF THE TRUTH DOESN'T COME OUT.
I NEED TIME.
WHEN I'VE LEARNED WHAT'S GOING ON, I'LL BRING IT TO YOU
12

DON'T *MOVE*, NATE! I KNOW HOW TO *USE* THIS THING.

YOU KNOW I DO!

YEAHH.

I SURE ENOUGH DO.

BUT I'M GOING TO *WALK* THROUGH THAT DOOR.

YOU'LL HAVE TO *SHOOT* ME IN THE BACK, OR GET INTO A *FIGHT* WITH ME TO *STOP* ME.

IF IT'S A FIGHT, I'LL PROBABLY *WIN*, BECAUSE I'VE GOT A LOT MORE TO LOSE THAN YOU DO.

IF YOU *SHOOT*.. YOU'LL *SLEEP LOUSY* FOR YEARS TO COME.

DON'T *MAKE ME* DO THIS, NATE. YOU'RE WANTED FOR *MURDER*... I CAN'T LET YOU GO...

I *DON'T HAVE* TO KILL YOU, YOU KNOW, YOU *DUMB IGNORAMUS!*

I CAN PUT A BULLET IN YOUR *LEG* AND TAKE YOU IN *HOBBLING!*

GIVE MY REGARDS TO BECKY.

I'LL BE IN *TOUCH*, MURRAY YOU'VE GOT MY *WORD* ON THAT.

JEEZ! YOU AND YOUR GODDAMN WORD!

THAT AND 5¢'LL GET ME A CUP OF *COFFEE!*

*GO ONNN!*

GET OUT 'VE HERE BEFORE I SHOOT YOU JUST OUT OF *ASSRA-VATION!*

THUMP

# SATURDAY, EARLY EVENING FEBRUARY 3, 1934

IT WAS A STRANGE WAY TO TRAVEL THROUGH THE CITY, AFRAID SOME STRANGER WOULD SHOUT MY NAME. NO ONE WAS HOME AT 125TH STREET. THE NEIGHBORS WANTED TO KNOW WHY I WAS ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT STELLA GULINO. I DECIDED TO RETURN TO MY OFFICE.

IT DIDN'T MATTER IF OSCAR RECOGNIZED ME OR NOT. HE WOULDN'T SHOUT "POLICE!" EVEN IF MY NAME HAD BEEN ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE DAILIES HE SOLD.

HE LOOKED AS IF LIFE HAD KICKED HIM IN THE GROIN ON A DAILY BASIS.

HAVING A CHILD WITH POLIO CAN DO THAT TO YOU. IT SEEMED LIKE HE USED TO TAKE MISFORTUNE BETTER.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, NATE?

I LIVE HERE, REMEMBER?

SURE, SURE, BUT...

BUT...YOU MEAN THE COPS? THEY BEEN LOOKING FOR ME?

THE COPS, YEAH, SURE. I FIGURED YOU WERE HIDING OUT.

DON'T WORRY, I JUST NEED A PLACE TO GET SOME SHUT-EYE.

HOW'S LITTLE ALBERT?

THE SAME. NO BETTER. NO WORSE.

YOU ALWAYS ASK, NATE. YOU'RE A GOOD MAN.

I'M A CHUMP, LIVING A FEW BLOCKS UP FROM SKID ROW, WITH A MURDER RAP OVER MY HEAD.

THAT'S THE KIND'VE GOOD MAN I AM.

THE PHONE WAS RINGING INSISTENTLY, LIKE BAD NEWS MAKING SURE IT WOULD BE HEARD.

RRING RRING

SHE HAD A HUSKY VOICE, THE KIND THAT RAISES THE MALE LIBIDO, EVEN IF SHE WAS ONLY TALKING ABOUT CHANGING A KID'S DIAPERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, SHE DIDN'T SOUND LIKE ANYBODY'S MOTHER.

LISTEN GOOD, 'CAUSE I'M ONLY SAYIN' THIS ONCE. SOME PEOPLE EVEN KNEW I WAS EVEN THINKIN' OF CALLIN' YOU, THEY'D PUT RAT POISON IN MY VEINS.

NICE FOLKS. TO WHOM DO I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF SPEAKING?

SHERRY DIANGELO, SWEETHEART I BEEN AROUND A BIT, AND I KNOW A LOT ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE INTERESTED IN.

I DON'T LIKE BEIN' TREATED DIRTY BY NO ONE. THE MAN YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR, IF HE'D PLAYED IT ON THE SQUARE WITH ME, I WOULDN'T BE CALLIN' YOU.

BUT THE SONOFABITCH BLACKENED MY EYE FOR ME. I'LL HAVE HIS HEART FOR THAT! I'LL EAT IT ON A BLUE PLATE SPECIAL!

YOU MEET ME ON THE STATEN ISLAND FERRY AT 10:30.

THERE WAS A NASTY SHADOW ON THE WALL. IT INSINUATED ITSELF OVER MY NAME LIKE SOME DIRE PROPHECY.

I WAS GETTING TIRED OF GUNS POINTED IN MY DIRECTION, OF THE SUDDEN SURGE OF ADRENALINE AND FEAR THAT CAME FROM KNOWING WHAT GUNS COULD DO TO FLESH, BONE, AND MUSCLE.

I'D SEEN TOO MANY YOUNG MEN, SOLDIERS AND POLICE-MEN, LYING IN HOSPITAL BEDS FROM WHICH THEY'D NEVER RISE WITHOUT HELP.

IT WAS "CADAVER" PICHANO, AS SILENT AND UNFATHOMABLE AS EVER.

I TRIED TO BREAK HIS UGLY HEAD. THE GRIMY WINDOW WITH MY NAME ON IT SHATTERED. PICHANO'S HEAD SEEMED TO STAY *INTACT*.

IT WAS A PAIN IN THE ASS, THIS UNCANNY KNACK HE HAD FOR SHOWING UP WHERE I WAS.

I WONDERED HOW HE DID THAT.

THE SKY ABOVE THE CITY WAS THE COLOR OF ICE, COLD AND IMPENETRABLE. AN INDEPENDENT TAXI BRAVED THE OMINOUS WEATHER.

TAKE ME DOWN TO THE BATTERY, TO THE FERRY.

YOU GOT IT, BUDDY!

BETTER TO BE EARLY THAN LATE. SHERRY DIANGELO DIDN'T SOUND LIKE THE KIND OF WOMAN WHO WAITED AROUND FOR LATE DATES.

WE TRAVELED DOWN BROADWAY, AND THE LIGHTS MELTED THE ICY AIR, PROMISING WARMTH AND STIMULATION.
THE BROADWAY SHOWS WERE LETTING OUT. MEN AND WOMEN WERE ON THE SIDEWALKS IN WINTER FINERY, LONG COATS AND MUFFLERS AND SCARVES OF SUBDUED COLORS.
THE REAR WINDOW BURST INWARD, WITH A SPRAY OF GLASS AND A CHUNK OF SOMETHING COLD, AS IF THE AIR TRULY HAD TURNED TO ICE.
THUNK
I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON!
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT CADAVER HAD FOUND ME AGAIN, LIKE SOME MONSTER IN A NIGHTMARE THAT YOU CANNOT ESCAPE.
GET OUT'VE THERE, MISTER! GONNA BE A LOT SAFER TAKING THE TRAINS TONIGHT!
THAT WAS JUST TO GET YOUR ATTENTION, FELLAS!
BAM
THE THING THAT HAD BROKEN THE WINDOW REALLY WAS A CHUNK OF ICE, NOT LONG OFF THE ICE MAN'S TRUCK.
AIN'T NO INDEPENDENT CABS HUSTLIN' BUSINESS WHILE US HONEST CABBIES ARE ON STRIKE!
NO ONE BREAKS THE LINES 'TILL LA GUARDIA GIVES US A DECENT SHAKE!
IT WASN'T CADAVER OUTSIDE, BUT ANOTHER NIGHTMARE, ONE OF THE CROWDED CITY GOING INEXPLICABLY BERSERK!

CROSS SWORDS WITH CHAMPIONS!

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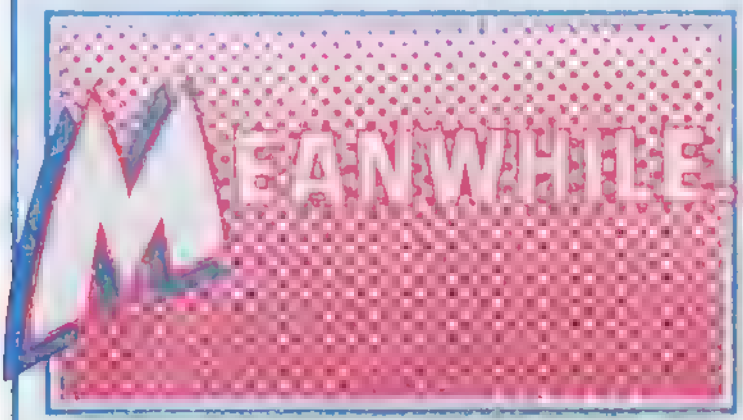



"The way of the trailblazer is often strewn with rock and thorny bushes." (Ancient Sicilian folk saying)

Blazing new trails can be an exhilarating adventure, but even the most cautious adventurer may find himself bruised and bleeding at journey's end. Such thoughts never entered our minds when we embarked on our oft-heralded DC talent search two years ago. Armed with the advice of my forebears and a confidence born of having spent some time in my 30-odd year career trying to develop new talent on a small scale, I ventured forth into the countryside determined to find the raw talent that would be tomorrow's creative force in the comic book industry.

Our search was successful, I'm glad we did it, but I gotta tell you...I was in no way prepared for the events that brought us to where we are now and if I had it to do over again, I'd need to find a new source of time and energy. It's been fun but it's been tough!

In 1981, I found myself in a decision-making capacity at DC Comics. It became clear to me that if DC (and the rest of the comic publishers, for that matter) was to continue publishing new material for an expanding market, we would have to find a way to enlarge the talent pool to accommodate the growth of new kinds of comics and new ideas, characters, and titles. Some very talented people had left comics for greener pastures. Others started doing less work in order to do it better to meet the demands of the rapidly emerging direct sale market. Still others left the industry because they could not meet those demands. And the influx of new talent wasn't sufficient to meet current schedule requirements, much less future ones.

So we embarked on our Talent Search...amid scoffing from some quarters and a watchful eye from all. (It's significant to note that most of the scoffers have since announced some form of talent search themselves!)

On the convention trail during 1982, I looked at portfolios and read script submissions till my eyes bled,..or felt like they did. Back at the office, mail submissions piled up at an alarming rate. Two things became quickly evident: 1) the talent was out there...in goodly numbers. 2) I couldn't handle the volume of work my other duties demanded and still conduct the talent search. What to do? We decided that a position should be created and a person hired to devote all his attention to the task of identifying, locating, and training new talent. The position: Talent Coordinator. And to fill it, old friend Sal Amendola. Sal was uniquely qualified for the job, having worked in every aspect of comic production and having spent a considerable amount of time in recent years teaching at **The School of Visual Arts** in New York City and **Joe Kubert's School of Cartoon Art** in Dover, New Jersey. When we announced Sal's arrival on the scene, mail submissions seemed to double, and during the 1983 convention swing we noticed that in addition to looking at many new portfolios, we found ourselves looking at updated portfolios of people whose work we had looked at in 1982. They came back again to show us that they had improved.

Fair questions: What has this all accomplished and where do we go from here? Quite a bit and as far as we can, see I.

1) The **New Talent Showcase** title was created to provide a vehicle to showcase the talents of some we feel are ready to our comic readers. A new, expanded version of this book will begin publication sometime in 1984.

2) Most, if not all, of the new names you'll find in the credits of DC Comics are products of the new talent program. We expect to add more new names.

3) Sal relentlessly prods our less adventuresome editors to take a chance with one of the artists or writers on his "ready" list (which we intend to turn into an actual catalogue). This list is comprised of people we feel need professional experience and feedback to take the next step in their development. This list adds considerably to our available talent pool.

4) Some of the writers and artists presented in the aforementioned **New Talent Showcase** turned pro before their new talent work was published (delays in scheduling were caused by a series of editorial assignment shifts) and often their pro assignments came from other publishers. I'm not always happy with that happening, but fair is fair...and it does expand the industry talent pool. It'll all shake out in the end.

Ah, the future! We are now requesting that mail submissions cease. We will not conduct talent searches at conventions in 1984. This is not because the new talent program is ended but because we must take the next step to bring the program to fruition. We call it phase II. To wit: All work that has been submitted to us will be returned with some evaluation or response. In some cases we will request updated samples for our in-house catalogue. Others will be informed that they are one of the fifty or so who we feel show the most promise. These fifty or so will be invited to attend seminars conducted by Sal Amendola and/or myself and others during the summer of 1984. The sites of these seminars will be determined by the demographics of the people chosen. Wherever possible, the seminars will be conducted in conjunction with or adjunct to comic conventions. Chicago and San Diego look like good bets. We are now making up that list and those on it will be informed before summer. Please don't call us...we'll call (or write) you with all the pertinent details as soon as they are determined. For those of you not on that list, DC Comics is currently preparing a sort of "How To..." book that may be helpful in improving your skills and providing the kind of information our talks with some of you have indicated would be most helpful. Sal Amendola and Nick Cuti will co-edit this book and more details will follow.

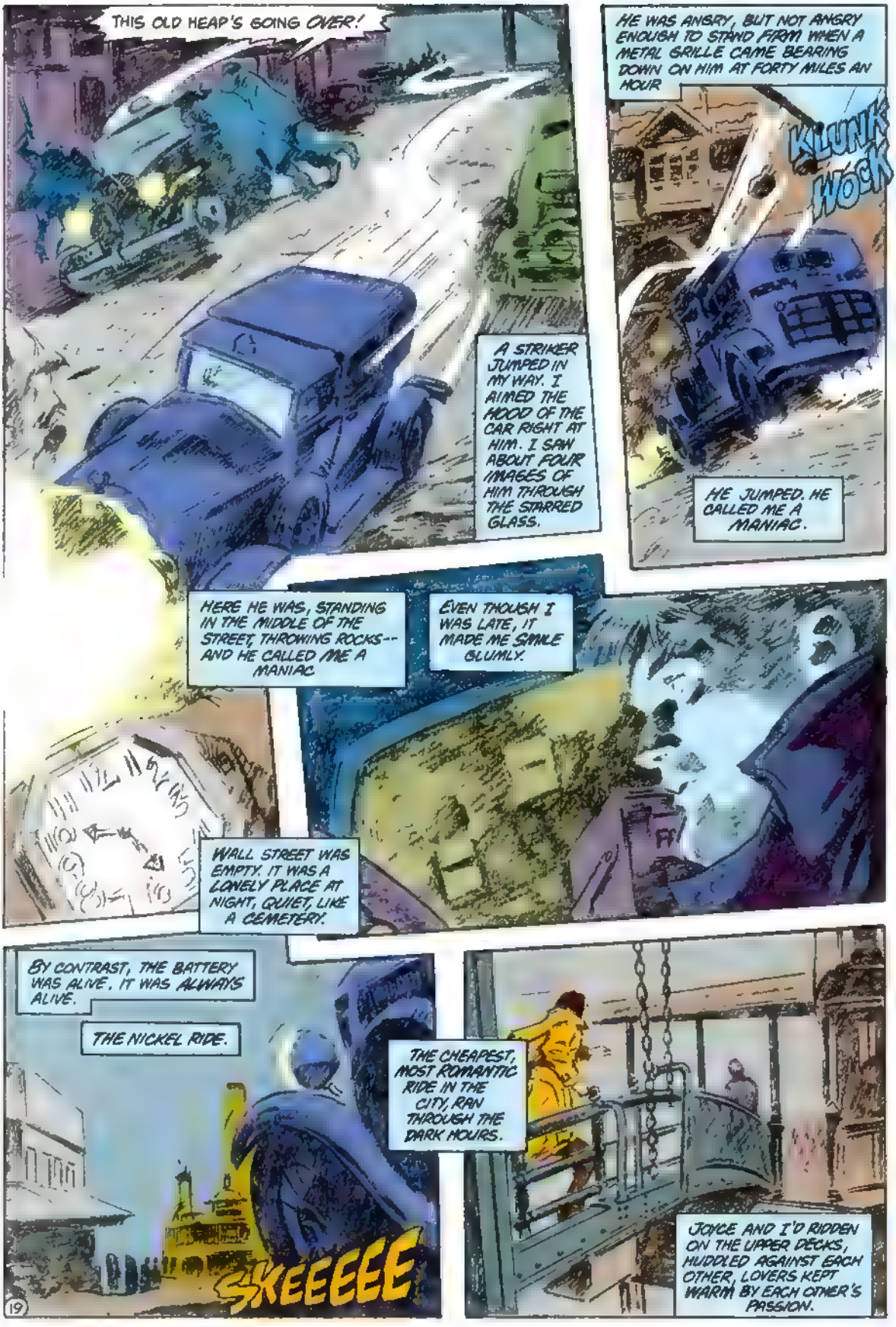
To all who submitted samples or came to talk to us at conventions, thanks for letting us look at your material. We know how much courage that often takes. We enjoyed talking with you and look forward to doing so again. We apologize to those who had to wait long periods of time for a response from us to their submissions. We did not anticipate the volume of submissions that were made and we were, and are, clearly understaffed. Moving our offices in November of 1982 didn't help either. Anyway, thanks a bunch for your participation, cooperation, and understanding when glitches developed. I appreciate.

And by the way, I made up that "ancient Sicilian folk saying" at the beginning of this column. It just seemed like a better way to start than "About our talent search..."

Thank you and good afternoon...

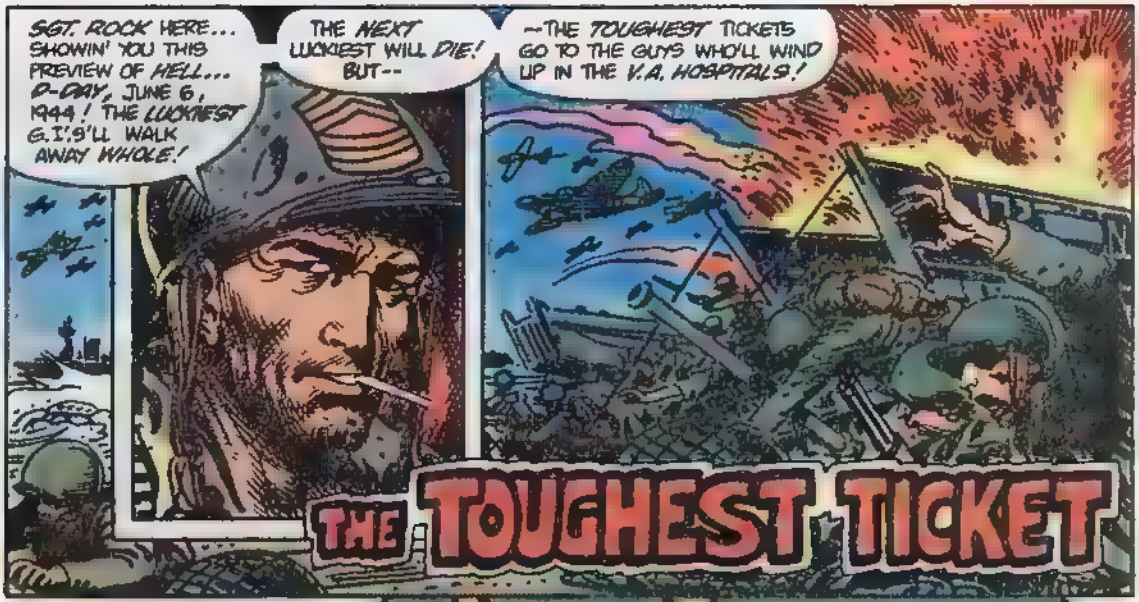
Dick

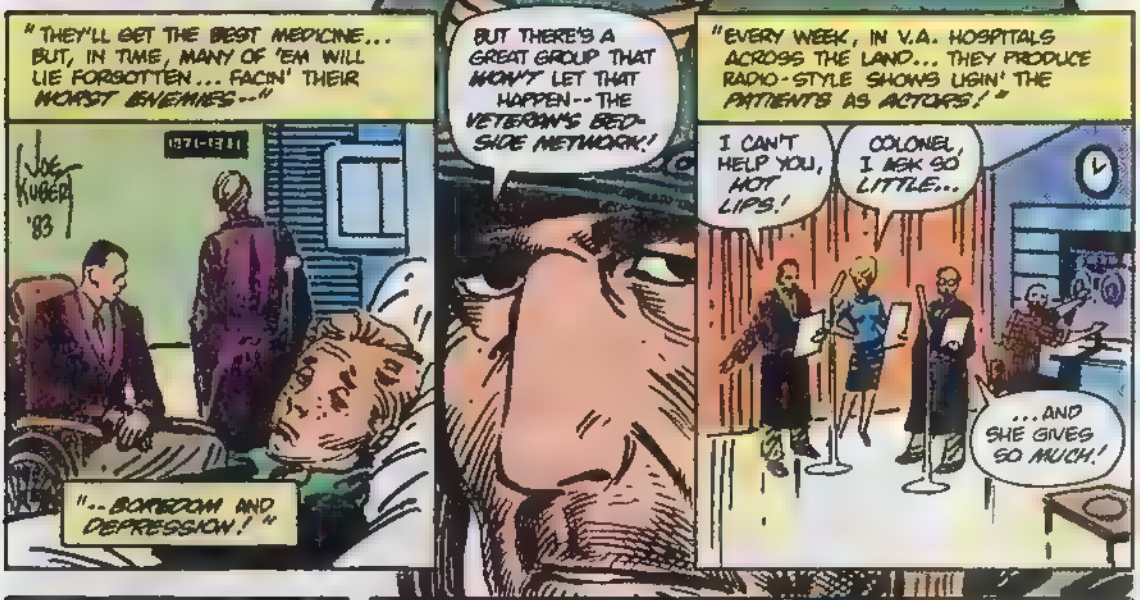
I DON'T THINK YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO GO ALONG FOR THIS RIDE--
--I'VE GOT A FEELING IT'S GOING TO BE A LITTLE BUMPY!
KLONK
HEY!
THAT'S MY HACK! YOU CAN'T JUST...
YOU AIN'T GONNA GO FAR! THERE'S CABBIES ALL OVER THE STREETS BETWEEN HERE AND MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, AN' THEY AIN'T SITTIN' DOWN AND TAKIN' IT NO MORE!
A ROCK STARRED THE WINDSHIELD. THE STREET-LAMPS' GLOW FRAGMENTED INTO KNIFE-EDGES OF LIGHT.
SMASH!
TOO MUCH TIME HAD PASSED!
SHE'D SAID 10:30.
SHE'D SAID NOT TO BE LATE!
THE STREETS WERE ICY. THERE WAS A MASS OF FIGURES OUTSIDE MADISON SQUARE.
ANGER WAS IN THE AIR, A THING THAT COULD BE FELT AS WELL AS HEARD.

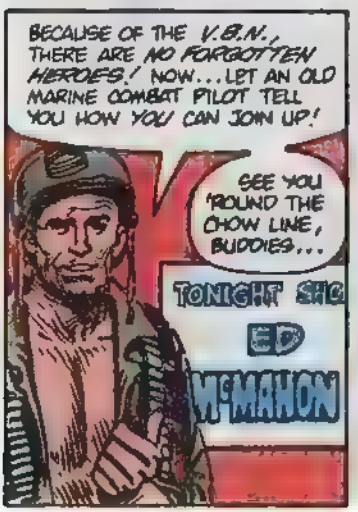

THIS OLD HEAP'S GOING OVER!
A STRIKER JUMPED IN MY WAY. I AIMED THE HOOD OF THE CAR RIGHT AT HIM. I SAW ABOUT FOUR IMAGES OF HIM THROUGH THE STARRED GLASS.
HE WAS ANGRY, BUT NOT ANGRY ENOUGH TO STAND FIRM WHEN A METAL GRILLE CAME BEARING DOWN ON HIM AT FORTY MILES AN HOUR
KLUNK
WOCK
HE JUMPED. HE CALLED ME A MANIAC.
HERE HE WAS, STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET, THROWING ROCKS-- AND HE CALLED ME A MANIAC.
EVEN THOUGH I WAS LATE, IT MADE ME SMILE GLUMLY.
WALL STREET WAS EMPTY. IT WAS A LONELY PLACE AT NIGHT, QUIET, LIKE A CEMETERY.
BY CONTRAST, THE BATTERY WAS ALIVE. IT WAS ALWAYS ALIVE.
THE NICKEL RIDE.
THE CHEAPEST, MOST ROMANTIC RIDE IN THE CITY, RAN THROUGH THE DARK HOURS.
SKEEEEE
JOYCE AND I'D RIDDEN ON THE UPPER DECKS, HUDDLED AGAINST EACH OTHER, LOVERS KEPT WARM BY EACH OTHER'S PASSION.

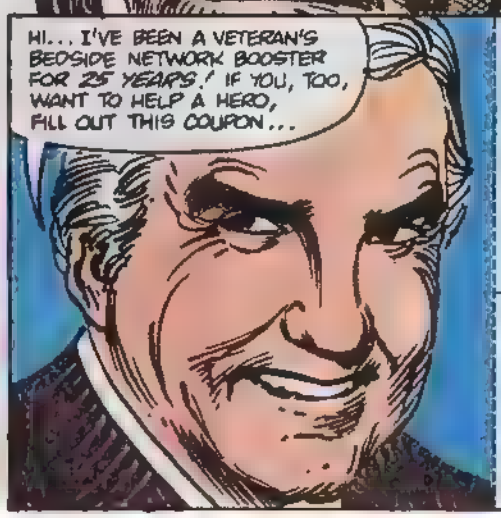
I FOUND HER IN THE DARKNESS OF THE UPPER DECK.
SHE HAD A HARD LOOK, LIKE RIVETS DRIVEN INTO STEEL--
--A LOOK THAT SAID SHE HAD THE WORLD FIGURED OUT, AND THERE WAS NOTHING WARM IN THAT WORLD.
SHE HAD A STYLE SHE RESERVED FOR MEN THAT SHE HAD PICKED UP FROM THE MOVIES AND APPLIED TO MORE CARNAL ACTIVITIES THAN THE HAYES COMMISSION ALLOWED ON THEATER SCREENS.
HELLO, HANDSOME.
LOOKING FOR SOMEONE?
MUST BE.
ELSE I WOULDN'T BE HERE FREEZING MY ASS OFF.
YOU'RE TOUGH.
BUT NOT AS TOUGH AS THAT BLOND GUY. HE'S A BIT SCREWY, IF YOU ASK ME.
IS THE BLOND GUY THE ONE WHO GAVE YOU THAT SHINER?
NAW. THE GUY DONE THIS IS THE GUY YOU WANT...THE GUY "BLONDIE" WORKS FOR.
THE GUY I WORK FOR, FOR THAT MATTER.
THE CREEP WANTED ME TO DO IT WITH HIM! LISTEN, BUSTER... I DO IT WITH A LOT OF GUYS. BUT NOT WITH SOMEONE WHO'S GOT WHAT HE'S GOT
20

IT SOUNDS LIKE HE'S GOT A LOT OF MOOLAH.
HE'S ALSO GOT SYPHILIS.
MY, MY... YOU'RE A REGULAR CANARY TONIGHT, AREN'T YOU, SHERRY?
GOOD THING THE BOSS HAD ME FOLLOW YOU. HE KNEW YOU WERE SORE
'COURSE, I DON'T THINK HE HAD A GLIMMER YOU WERE GOING TO MEET THE SHAMUS WITH THE CHARMED LIFE.
'COURSE, THOSE GUYS WHO WERE SUPPOSED TO GIVE YOU A ONE-WAY TICKET TO THE MORGUE--
--THEY'RE NOT AS GOOD AS ME
HE HAD BEEN A FIGHTER ONCE, A HEAVY-WEIGHT, BUT NOT LONG ENOUGH TO DO MORE THAN BREAK HIS NOSE A FEW TIMES.
THE BOSS WANTS YOU BAD, SHAMUS ... MAYBE IT'S THE SICKNESS GETTING TO HIS BRAIN--
HE DIDN'T LOOK AS IF A BROKEN NOSE WOULD BOTHER HIM MUCH.
HE WAS BUILT LIKE A BULL, AND HAD A LOOK IN HIS EYES THAT SAID HE HAD GORED MANY A MATADOR IN HIS TIME




Yes, I want to help a hero
I'm at least 16 years old.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____ _____

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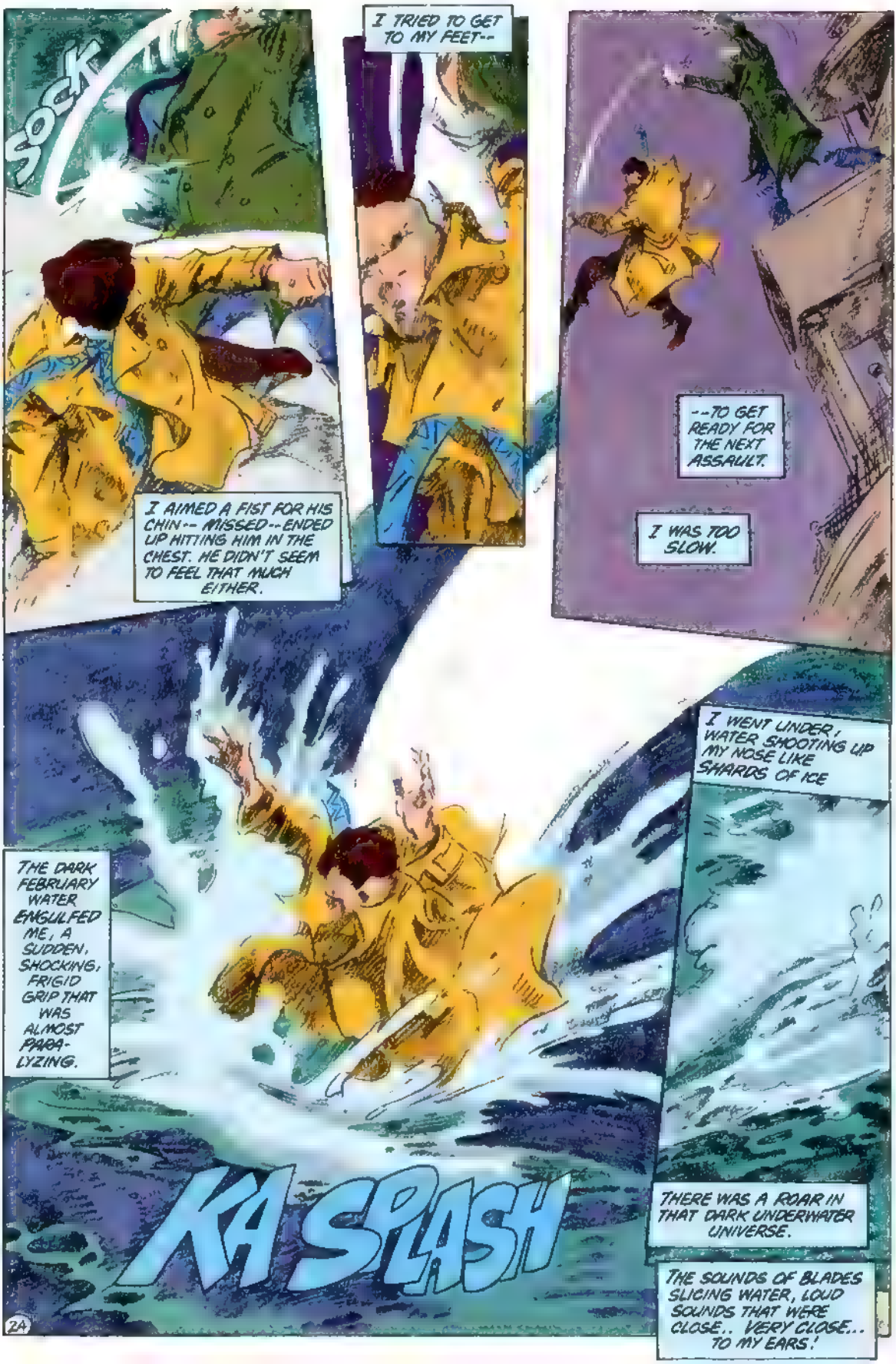
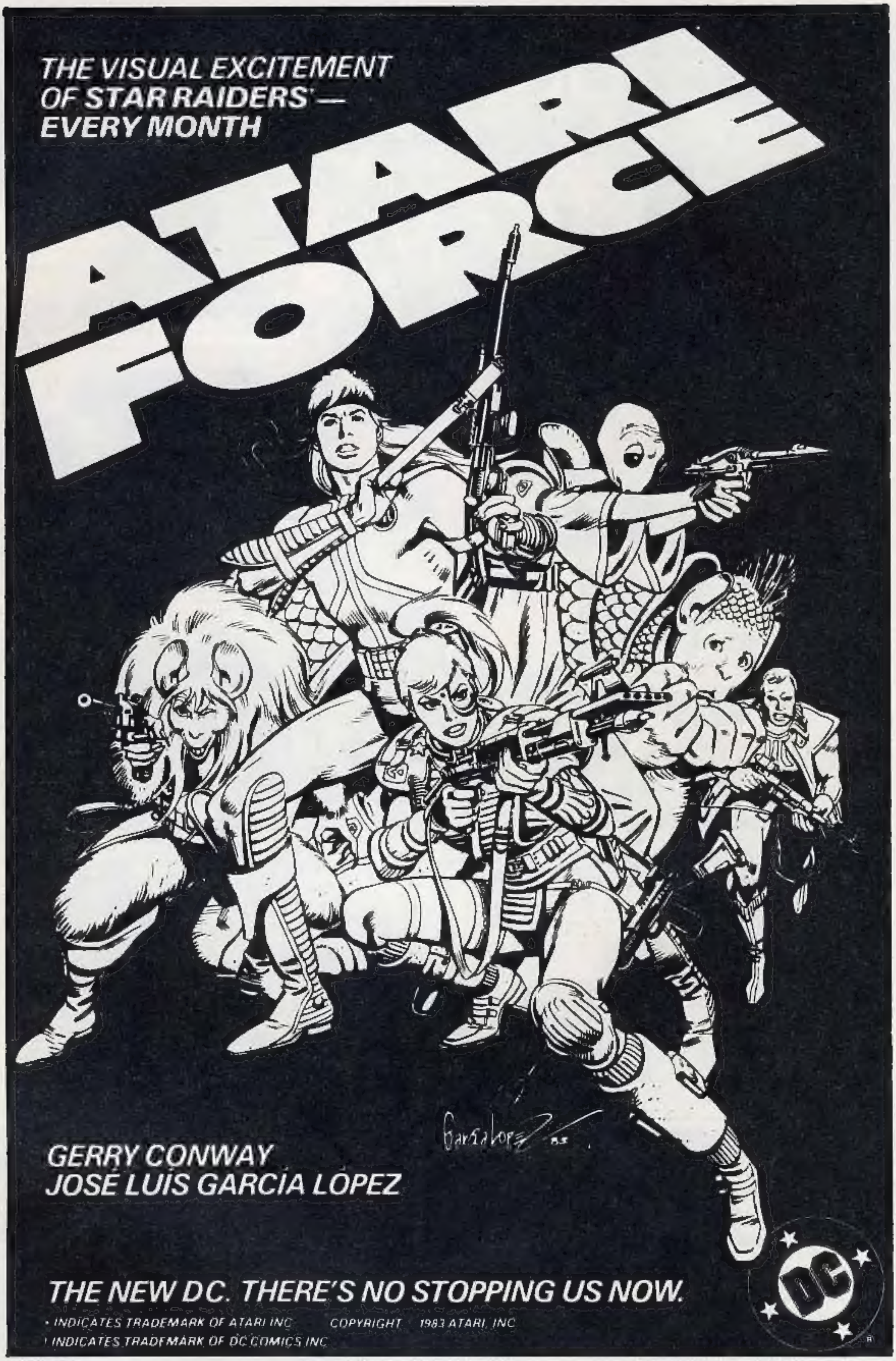
-- BUT HE WANTS YOU DEAD.
HE SAYS, NO MORE GUNPLAY. IT'S GETTING TOO PUBLIC. NOW, HE JUST WANTS YOU TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT.
I THINK DROWNING'S A GOOD ACCIDENT WHAT DO YOU THINK?
THEN AGAIN, YOU GOT TO CONSIDER... A GUY CAN GET CAUGHT IN THE SCREWS OF ONE OF THESE FERRIES.
COULD TURN A GUY INTO HAMBURGER.
SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOU TAKE THE PLUNGE
I'M THE ONE WHO DID THE DAME IN.
I DO A GOOD JOB--
--DON'T I?
THE FERRY LURCHED--
--AND HE LOST HIS BALANCE JUST FOR A SECOND.
22

I WENT FOR HIM, REACHING OUT AS FAR AS I COULD. HIS GUN SWUNG UP. HE'D USE IT IF HE HAD TO.
HE'D SAID HE'D MURDERED JOYCE. HE'D SAID IT SMUGLY. NO REMORSE THE WAY HE COULD SWAT AN INSECT.
I HIT HIM WITH A LEFT, CATCHING HIS NOSE SOMETHING CRACKED.
I HAD BEEN RIGHT A BROKEN NOSE DIDN'T BOTHER HIM MUCH.
WE GRAPPLED, TWO AWKWARD FIGURES ENCUMBERED BY BULKY OVERCOATS, GOING FOR BLOOD.
WE FELL OVER THE RAILING, THE NIGHT SKY WHIRLING CRAZILY ABOVE US.
WHUMP
WE HIT ON TOP OF THE MEN'S ROOM. SOMEONE FROM BELOW CURSED WE'D PROBABLY MADE HIM MISS THE URINAL.


SOCK
I TRIED TO GET TO MY FEET--
I AIMED A FIST FOR HIS CHIN -- MISSED -- ENDED UP HITTING HIM IN THE CHEST. HE DIDN'T SEEM TO FEEL THAT MUCH EITHER.
--TO GET READY FOR THE NEXT ASSAULT.
I WAS TOO SLOW.
I WENT UNDER, WATER SHOOTING UP MY NOSE LIKE SHARDS OF ICE
THE DARK FEBRUARY WATER ENGULFED ME, A SUDDEN, SHOCKING, FRIGID GRIP THAT WAS ALMOST PARA-LYZING.
KA SPLASH
THERE WAS A ROAR IN THAT DARK UNDERWATER UNIVERSE.
THE SOUNDS OF BLADES SLICING WATER, LOUD SOUNDS THAT WERE CLOSE.. VERY CLOSE... TO MY EARS!

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